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SUBJECT: DHI QAR ELECTIONS UPDATE: SHELL GAME FAVORS DA'WA
IN DHI QAR

Classified By: PRT Deputy Team Leader Keith Heffern for reasons 1.4 (b)
(d)

(U) This is a PRT Dhi Qar reporting cable.

¶1. (C) Summary: All PRT contacts in Dhi Qar claim to want a change from the current elected officials, but the educated elite recognize that not many alternatives exist to the three main religious parties (ISCI, Da'wa, and Fadhila). Out of 67 political parties on the Dhi Qar ballot, only the Communist Party appears as a viable secular option for the educated voter. Da'wa has likely created the best strategy to garner the most votes. End Summary.

Shell Game

¶2. (C) Based on discussions with technocrats from the State Board of Antiquities and Heritage and Dhi Qar University, religious parties have changed names and candidates have even reverted to given names (eliminating their known tribal names) in an effort to confuse the voting populace and garner votes. They claim that the deception is relatively obvious for the educated voter, but will likely result in the religious parties carrying the day. In particular, it was thought that the new parties aligned with Da'wa were well positioned in Dhi Qar for three main reasons: 1) voters credit Prime Minister Maliki for bringing relative security and stability; 2) Da'wa provides an alternative to ISCI, the party of the current Governor, Aziz Alwan, who receives the lion's share of criticism for any perceived failures of the current provincial government; and 3) the Da'wa-backed Tribal Support Councils have garnered a fair share of the rural vote.

Communists Provide Secular Choice

¶3. (C) Known as the birthplace of the Communist Party in Iraq, Nasiriyah has long held a core group of educated professionals who support them as an alternative to the big three religious parties that currently dominate the Provincial Council (PC). Persecuted and exiled by the Saddam regime, the Communist Party did not fare particularly well in the 2005 elections but have reorganized and gained more traction as stability has returned to Dhi Qar. Generally they pull favor based on their secular nature and their ability to field technocrats. Hopeful contacts amongst the doctors and archeologists known to the PRT, predict that the Communist Party will gain two or three seats in the new PC.

¶4. (C) Comment: The ballot is confusing, not only due to the vast number of candidates and parties but also due to the shifting names of political parties and candidates using names they are not known by popularly. The vast majority of voters will probably not welcome the speculation that the main religious parties will win in Dhi Qar, but the analysis is probably accurate. People want change, but viable liberal, secular alternatives have not yet taken root. The

potential for a strong independent tribal alliance, much reported on in the early stages of the campaign, has been co-opted by funding from the big three parties, especially Da'wa. This is to be expected given that tribal leaders have always tended to follow the money. End Comment.

CROCKER